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TAGS: PARM PREL KPAL IS EG

SUBJECT: RELATIVE CALM ON THE GAZA BORDER FOLLOWING GOE  
"MESSAGES" TO HAMAS

REF: A. CAIRO 738

1B. CAIRO 561

1C. CAIRO 488

1D. CAIRO 452 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: DCM Stuart Jones for reason 1.4 (b).

11. (S) Summary: LAWIO Deputy Chief BG Osama Abd El-Azziz and MFA Palestinian Affairs Director Badr Abdelatty both told us April 13 that the Gaza border is calmer than it had been following Hamas' April 8 threat to breach the border. BG Osama said that the GOE has reinforced its Border Guard Forces with Central Security Forces so that there are now approximately one thousand GOE "security personnel" on the border in a "high alert" posture. Abdelatty said that Egypt had sent Hamas messages through firm public statements and the augmented security presence. He believes the border is now calm as a result. However, Abdelatty cautioned that Hamas could breach the border at any time. Abdelatty said the GOE is trying to persuade Israel to allow increased fuel and other humanitarian goods into Gaza, and he requested a U.S. approach to Israel along the same lines. End summary.

12. (S) LAWIO Deputy Chief BG Osama Abd El-Azziz told us April 13 that the situation on the Gaza border is currently calmer than it has been since Hamas' public threat of a breach April 18. He said that the GOE has reinforced its Border Guard Forces with Central Security Civilian Police Forces so that there are now approximately one thousand GOE "security personnel" on the border. He said that GOE security forces have adopted a "high alert" posture, and that the GOE is "satisfied" with the precautions it has taken on the border.

13. (S) BG Osama said there have been no Palestinian demonstrations on the border since April 11. Asked about the current status of tunneling under the border, he assessed that the GOE's augmented security presence at the border would deter Palestinian attempts to increase the network of tunnels. BG Osama also told us that the GOE facilitated the transfer of humanitarian donations and fuel into Gaza April 111. He said that Egyptian gas stations in Al-Arish and Rafah are currently open. (Note: these gas stations were a magnet to Palestinians during the January border breach. End note)

14. (C) On April 13, MFA Palestinian Affairs Director Badr Abdelatty also described the current situation on the border as calm. He said that the GOE sent Hamas a message, both through public statements promising a "firm response" to a border breach, and through deploying Ministry of the Interior Central Security Forces to the border April 11 to supplement Border Guard Forces. He said that the GOE has also sent Central Security Forces to forward positions in Al-Arish and Ismailiya where they are ready to reinforce the forces at the

Gaza border if necessary. Abdelatty said the GOE has positioned snipers a short distance from the border in order to see into Gaza and provide intelligence on Hamas activities behind the border.

¶ 5. (C) Abdelatty said that despite Egypt's security posture and the border wall, Hamas could orchestrate a border breach at any time and is looking for a pretext to do so. He said that Hamas is using threats of a breach to pressure Egypt into a weaker position on the current cease-fire negotiations in Al-Arish. Abdelatty believes Hamas thinks its threats can pressure Egypt into opening Rafah for humanitarian goods, and also pressure Israel into agreeing to a cease-fire in the West Bank. Abdelatty said militants designed the April 9 Nahal Oz attack to provoke Israel into creating a humanitarian "crisis" in Gaza; he elaborated by saying that the militants chose the Nahal Oz fuel depot as a target specifically to goad Israel into cutting off fuel supplies from Israel into Gaza.

¶ 6. (C) Abdelatty said that Hamas tactics notwithstanding, the Egyptians have adopted the position that Israel needs to allow more fuel into Gaza to avert a blackout, and to avoid playing into Hamas' hands. He also said that if Israel does not allow more humanitarian supplies into Gaza, the Egyptians fear that Hamas will use this as a pretext to breach the Egyptian border. He asked that the USG also convey this message to the Government of Israel.

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